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ABSTRACT

Because of outside pressures, interscholastic debate is currently experiencing a period of criticism and self-examination, a factor which should cause debate directors to seek innovations in their programs. The best opportunities for experimentation are at workshops and summer institutes. One suggestion is that teams be given options in alloting their time, depending on whether they wish to give more emphasis to refutation or to constructive speeches. Immediate feedback could be provided to the debaters if the judge were to indicate at certain moments during a debate round, using a scorecard, how individual speakers are being rated. Judges should also be allowed to give tie decisions when the teams are so closely matched that a definitive decision is difficult to make. Finally, there could be an interruption system, so that an opponent or judge could stop a speaker for questions about material just presented. These are examples of innovations that should be subjected to workshop experiments. (RN)

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DEBATE INNOVATIONS AT WORKSHOPS

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DEBATE INNOVATIONS AT WORKSHOPS

Interscholastic debate is again experiencing a period of renaissance of self-examination by considerable outside agitation. Probably not since the Murphy stir over switch side debating have so many questions been asked about the past, present, and future of debate. Much of the criticism centers on the lack of change in interscholastic debate. I submit that this is an opportune time to promote innovation in debate. I further believe that the summer institute can best provide the proving ground and leadership for change. Unfortunately, directors of major high school and college tournaments have, by in large, most often stayed with the most traditional procedures. Indeed it is difficult to find any real changes in the past 20 years in methods of judging, time allotments to speakers, increased interaction between speaker and critic. Some internal changes are evident. Few would deny that some debaters have varied their case construction rather significantly since 1960 and the quantity if not the quality of evidence has been remarkably increased during recent years. The chief modification of debating has been internal and has been made by the debaters.

I would suggest only a few of the many changes that might prove useful for debaters, coaches, and the debate discipline. Hopefully, these are changes that could be incorporated into any workshop without jeopordizing its intent or prestige.

As previously mentioned, the 1960's brought with it a good deal of shifting in thinking in terms of case design. One of these, the comparative advantage case, has proven to be the most widely employed. With this affirmative approach came the negative

defense, characterized by the use of disadvantages, plan yield advantage arguments, and workability arguments. Together they provided the thrust for the negative spread. Anyone here who has ever listened to these negative tactics very often employed in the 15-minute block has wondered what an affirmative can do in a 5-minute period or less with cross-exam debating to answer the negative block. While the critic may deplore the negative strategy, he is forced to give that side the ballot because the affirmative just did not respond to all of the plan attacks or have time to return to the advantages. What concerns many critics is that the affirmative speech becomes no more than a series of assertions, glib statements, one-sentence evidence statements, seldom incorporating any in-depth analysis, new evidence or advancement of an argument.

Some coaches may suggest that the negative teams should only bring up issues that can realistically be dealt with by the affirmative teams. But for the great majority with a more pluralistic pragamatic attitude, the approach of changing negative tactics by altering affirmative time allotments seems more realistic. I propose that at the beginning of the debate, the affirmative announce that they plan to use a comparative advantage case or goals criteria case and will reduce their constructives up to two minutes and allocate this time to the first affirmative rebuttalist.

The chief advantage of this system is that the time better reflects what is needed rather than what is prescribed. The process is by no means an unmanageable one. The affirmative team could simply indicate that they plan to use the 9-9-7-5 option. Other variations

could be employed. Bernie Brock and Steve Fieldman report in the 1973 spring AFA journal an experiment of varied time allocation used at the Drury trounament. Their conclusions support the concept that somewhat major changes are possible at a tournament, that these changes seem to elicit favorable student response, but the impetus for change seems to come from outside.

In terms of time allotment, the possibilities for innovation seem almost endless. One might, for example, question the premise that debate should take an hour. The 20-minute debate seems much more akin to present-day public speaking situations.

Probably no area in debate is more controversial than that of the role of the judge. While much has been written concerning the competency of the critic, too little has been said of the feedback that occurs during the clash. W. Barnett Pierce, 1968, research indicated that the debater was quite unsure of how the debate was going or what the judge said on the ballot.[3] Another survey of high school debaters noted that after the debates fully 90 percent of the debaters believed that they had won.

Two means that could be used to aid the debaters and the judges would necessitate only minor inconvenience to tournament officials and critics. The critic or critics would be supplied with timecard-size cards which could duplicate the scoring method chosen by the tournament manager. For instance, if a 30-point ballot were used, then the cards could include that range or a 1 - 5 point scale could be utilized. One might guess that the narrower range could result in requests for cards that would include decimals, much like those used in many olympic events.

Thus, at the end of certain speeches, possibly the second and fourth constructives, the judge(s) would hold up a score for the

affirmative and then one for the negative team. Obviously, there are numerous variations possible. What is important, however, is that the audience begins to take a more active role in the debate and gives rather immediate re-enforcement to a team's efforts or lack of them. While the judge does have to work a little harder during the debate, his critique becomes simpler because he can make reference to those happenings that were influencing his decisions. If a panel were used, they could be seated in such a way that their reactions were given to the debaters, not other judges.

Another way that well might improve judging is to make it more honest. This comment relates not to any little known ethical problems of various intrigues, but to the situation that arises whereby the judge simply does not know ~~who~~ to whom to award the decision. This can happen for innumerable reason, including such good ones as those occasions when two great teams meet and seem so evenly matched throughout that debate. Then, of course, there are those instances in which a judge hears two less than great teams in which it seems unlikely that either team could possibly win. In these, and similar cases, a judge does give a decision. But it often seems a dishonest one. That critic was not able to say what he wanted to say--that the debate should be ruled a tie.

This third option could create some problems especially if it were used somewhat indiscriminately or as a lazy man's way out of the grading process. In any case the manager's job is not impossible. Ties can be converted to scores. Thus assigning a score of 1.0 to each win, .5 to each tie, and 0 for a loss, a tournament manager could determine teams eligible for finals or

whatever.

A final suggestion reflects the distress that audiences and debaters have as they hear an unclear definition, hazy evidence, or serious break in reasoning. In typical oral discourse when something is unclear, the listener interrupts that speaker and asks him for clarification. The closest the debate would come to that system is to employ cross-examination. There are problems with this process but that is a topic better relegated to another place and time.

In order to create greater reality to debate, to reduce the hazy quality of certain evidence or arguments, and to sharpen the interaction of the debaters and audience, I propose that an interruption system be tried. This would simply be a process by which an opponent or judge might stop a speaker and ask a question or series of question over material previously presented.

This period could occur during any of the constructive speeches, would not be over one minute in duration, would not be during the last two minutes of speech, and, because most first affirmatives have manuscript speeches, this speaker would not have that time taken from his speech. Thus if the interruption period lasted 40 seconds, the timer would add that to the affirmatives time.

If the critic stopped to ask questions and his time might eventually have to be curbed, that time might simply be added to the length of the debate.

All of us are aware of the difficulties involved when we are asked to make changes. Some might quite justifiably think that the risks are too great. For those who are reluctant to try one of these suggestions or one that has been lurking in their own recesses, the nearly 100 summer speech institutes might provide a particularly

good atmosphere for innovation.[4]

Whether these suggestions are tried at a summer institute, the Horshoe Invitational, an argumentation class, or whether they are rejected and replaced with the reader's own mind blowing suggestions, let next season be the year of evolution in inter-scholastic debate. Much will depend upon the leadership at work-shops and the support given by teachers who send students to those workshops.

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